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ABSTRACT

The needs of evening students at Shelby State Community College campuses were surveyed in 1984, with attention to reasons for continuing one's education, employment status, preferred class times, and preferred teaching formats. Sixty-five questions were included dealing with students' perceived personal, academic, and career development concerns. Major reasons for enrollment were: to become better educated, general self-improvement, to obtain a higher degree, personal satisfaction, and to increase income. About 75 percent were employed, with about 58 percent working on a full-time basis and 16.5 percent working on a part-time basis. Additional findings include: 74.2 percent preferred evening classes; 41.9 percent preferred the traditional lecture format; and 43.8 preferred either small group discussion or self-paced study. Factor analysis was conducted on 65 need items for 941 students who completed all the items. Four factors explained more than 50 percent of the total variance: need for personal development and self-improvement, need for academic skill improvement, need for career development skills, and need for understanding social issues and individual differences. A list of the 65 needs and student ratings for each need are included, along with information on the 10 significant need factors. (SW)

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Factor Analysis of Evening Student Needs: Implications for Planning

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of the
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SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION FOR INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH

This paper was presented at the 1984 Annual Conference of the Southern Association for Institutional Research held in Little Rock, Arkansas, October 24-26, 1984. It was reviewed by the SAIR Publications Committee and was judged to be of interest and pertinent to others concerned with the research in higher education. This paper has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC collection of Conference Papers.

Richard D. Howard
President, SAIR

Factor Analysis of Evening Student Needs: Implications for Planning

A survey of evening students enrolled at all SSCC campus locations during the 1984 winter quarter was administered in classes during the last week of January. This survey was conducted in cooperation with the Division of Instruction.

Purpose

The major purpose of the survey was to perform a needs assessment of the evening students in order to determine basic perceived needs of those students for planning purposes. The general findings of the survey should provide information for planning relative to programs of instruction, student services, and administration of programs and services.

Instrument

Information was obtained on reasons the students were continuing their education, their employment status, preference for time schedule of classes, and preference for instructional modes.

The questionnaire also included 65 questions related to perceived needs of the students related to personal, academic and career development concerns. A four-point scale of "very important" to "not a reason" was used for the responses to the needs items.

Social security number and name were also obtained in order to obtain demographic information not requested on this survey for possible future subgroup analyses. Student comments were solicited to obtain qualitative information not included in the questionnaire items. A copy of the survey form is included as an

appendix.

Analyses

Descriptive statistics and percentages were obtained on all the questionnaire items. In addition, a factor analysis was performed on the 65 needs items in order to explore clustering patterns or to identify more basic underlying common factor needs of the evening students.

Methods

The survey instrument was designed by the Office of Institutional Research and approved by the President's Council. With the permission of the Dean of Instruction, the faculty administered the survey to all evening students in classes during the week of January 23 - 27. Division Chairpersons and Department Heads coordinated the distribution and return of the surveys. Data entry and analyses were performed by the Office of Institutional Research.

Usable survey responses were available on 1188 evening students. These were unique responses with all duplicates removed prior to analysis.

RESULTS

Descriptive

The results indicate that the major reason the evening students were continuing their education was "to become better educated", with 73.4% considering this reason very important. Slightly more than 98% considered this reason as "important to very important". Large percentages also responded "important to very important" on "general self-improvement" (90.1%), "to obtain

a higher degree" (88.9%), "for personal satisfaction or happiness" (87.7%), and "to improve my income" (83.7%). Also rated "important to very important" by large percentages were "to meet job requirements or improve job skills" (79.3%), "to learn a new occupation or trade" (78.7%), and "to obtain or maintain a certificate" (68.3%). Of lesser importance was the item "to meet new people" with about 64% considering this item as an unimportant reason for continuing their education. These results are detailed in Table 1.

The majority of the evening students (74.6%) reported that they were employed, with 58.1% employed on a full-time basis and 16.5% employed on a part-time basis. There were 13.8% of the evening students who reported that they were unemployed and seeking employment. The remaining 11.6% were in military service, full-time homemakers, unavailable for employment, or retired. This information is provided in Table 2.

Two questionnaire items pertained to the scheduling time preference for classes and the preferred instructional mode. Most of the students (74.2%) indicated that they preferred evening classes. The remaining 25.8% preferred morning, afternoon, or weekend classes, with 4.1% of these students indicating no preference. A sizeable number of the students (41.9%) indicated a preference for the traditional lecture format as the mode of instruction. Another 43.8% preferred either small group discussion or self-paced study. The remaining 14.3% reported either a combination of the formats or no preference. These results are also reported in Table 2.

TABLE 1

Reasons Evening Students are Continuing Their Education

	Reason	N*	Not a Reason n	%	Unimportant n	%	Important n	%	Very Important n	%	Mean
1	To become better educated	1134	14	1.2	8	0.7	280	24.7	832	73.4	3.70
2	To obtain a higher degree	1133	103	9.1	23	2.0	281	24.8	726	64.1	3.44
3	To improve my income	1125	137	12.2	47	4.2	254	22.6	687	61.1	3.33
4	For general self-improvement	1115	77	6.9	33	3.0	471	42.2	534	47.9	3.31
5	For personal satisfaction or happiness	1111	108	9.7	29	2.6	479	43.1	495	44.6	3.23
6	To meet job requirements or improve job skills	1123	182	16.2	51	4.5	269	24.0	621	55.3	3.18
7	To learn a new occupation	1121	184	16.4	53	4.7	284	25.3	599	53.4	3.16
8	To obtain or maintain a certificate	1096	281	25.6	66	6.0	306	27.9	443	40.4	2.83
9	To meet new people	1095	485	44.3	218	19.9	310	28.3	82	7.5	1.99

Total N = 1188
*N = number responding to item

TABLE 2

Evening Student Employment Status and Class-Type Preference

Employment Status

N = 1179

Employed Full-Time	685	58.1
Employed Part-Time	195	16.5
Unemployed, Seeking employment	163	13.8
Military Service	33	2.8
Full-Time Homemaker	62	5.3
Unavailable for Employment	38	3.2
Retired	3	0.3
	1179	100.0

Most Convenient Type of Class

N = 1171

Morning Classes	146	12.5
Afternoon Classes	69	5.9
Evening Classes	869	74.2
Week-End Classes	39	3.3
No Preference	48	4.1
	1171	100.0

Class-Type Preference

N = 1088

Traditional Lecture	456	41.9
Small Group Discussion	261	24.0
Self-Paced Study	215	19.8
Other	31	2.8
No Preference	125	11.5
	1088	100.0

The responses to the items corresponding to perceived needs of the students were all in a positive direction indicating that the items did indeed reflect the needs of evening students at SSCC. Of the 1188 usable surveys, 247 did not complete all the items. The results of the needs assessment are presented in Table 3 and are ordered by the highest to lowest average response on each item.

Those items on which 80 - 85% of the evening students perceived as important to very important needs were setting goals; learning about training requirements for jobs; identifying career areas; learning about job opportunities in the new career areas; and improving study skills and habits. Setting goals was the most frequently perceived need with 84% of the evening students considering this item important, 51.7% as a "very important" need and 32.3% as an "important" need.

Items that 70 - 79% of the students perceived as important were arranging a class schedule that would not conflict with their job; improving reading comprehension; learning where to get training in their career interest areas; developing self-confidence; selecting educational programs that fit their interests and skills; learning about income potential in their career interest areas; increasing their skills in mathematics, public speaking, writing, and test-taking; learning effectively on their own; identifying their strengths and abilities; and getting advice about their educational plans.

Sixty to sixty-nine percent of the students perceived the following needs as important to very important: learning more

about entrance requirements; becoming more independent; getting full-time job experience in a new career area; discussing career interests with people employed in that area; learning how to communicate better with instructors; increasing reading speed; learning how to get course credit through nontraditional means; time management; understanding and expressing their personal values; developing decision-making and problem-solving skills; learning more about graduation requirements; and learning to work with academic advisers.

Fifty to fifty-nine percent of the evening students perceived the following needs as important to very important: learning how to handle pressure; using leisure time effectively; obtaining access to college offices after work hours; learning how to transfer college credits; developing a resume; learning how to maintain their mental and physical health; obtaining full-time or part-time experience in their career interest area; dealing with conflicts of job, family, and education; learning how to interview for a job; understanding rights and responsibilities as a consumer; learning to budget money wisely; dealing with people who think and act differently; getting along with people in their work environment; learning about available jobs near their home; dealing objectively with racial or sexual discrimination; dealing effectively with community problems; and understanding other people of different cultures and backgrounds.

The remaining items were considered important needs by less than 50% of the evening students. However 25 - 50% did consider all the remaining items to be important to very important needs.

T A B L E 3

17-Feb-1984
Page 1

Evening Students Survey
Needs Assessment

PERCEIVED NEED	TOTAL N	VERY UNIMP N	VERY UNIMP PCNT	UNIMP N	UNIMP PCNT	IMP N	IMP PCNT	VERY IMP N	VERY IMP PCNT	MEAN
Setting Goals	1127	129	11.4	51	4.5	364	32.3	583	51.7	3.24
Training Requirements for Jobs	1115	158	14.2	52	4.7	353	31.7	552	49.5	3.17
Identifying Career Areas	1124	161	14.3	52	4.6	386	34.3	525	46.7	3.13
Job Opportunities	1117	160	14.3	47	4.2	395	35.4	515	46.1	3.13
Improving Study Skills	1120	141	12.6	67	6.0	484	43.2	428	38.2	3.07
Arranging Class Schedule	1104	190	17.2	88	8.0	314	28.4	512	46.4	3.04
Training for New Career	1103	169	15.3	67	6.1	413	37.4	454	41.2	3.04
Developing Self-Confidence	1119	171	15.3	71	6.3	439	39.2	438	39.1	3.02
Improve Reading Comprehension	1126	179	15.9	81	7.2	456	40.5	410	36.4	2.97
Selecting Educational Programs	1102	170	15.4	85	7.7	454	41.2	393	35.7	2.97
Understanding Races/Cultures	1085	401	37.0	136	12.5	374	34.5	174	16.0	2.96
Income Potential in Career	1102	189	17.2	82	7.4	432	39.2	399	36.2	2.94
Improving Math Skills	1120	181	16.2	85	7.6	470	42.0	384	34.3	2.94
Identifying Strengths	1113	187	16.8	77	6.9	495	44.5	354	31.8	2.91
Advice re Educational Plans	1093	187	17.1	93	8.5	469	42.9	344	31.5	2.89
Test-taking Skills	1111	208	18.7	109	9.8	398	35.8	396	35.6	2.88
Independent Learning Skills	1114	203	18.2	74	6.6	509	45.7	328	29.4	2.86
Improving Speaking Skills	1123	209	18.6	116	10.3	464	41.3	334	29.7	2.82
Improving Writing Skills	1119	208	18.6	116	10.4	474	42.4	321	28.7	2.81
Entrance Requirements	1082	215	19.9	111	10.3	430	39.7	326	30.1	2.80
Becoming More Independent	1119	271	24.2	108	9.7	341	30.5	399	35.7	2.78
Full-time Exp. in New Career	1098	270	24.6	129	11.7	339	30.9	360	32.8	2.72
Discussing Career Interests	1089	244	22.4	121	11.1	430	39.5	294	27.0	2.71
Communication with Instructors	1086	245	22.6	104	9.6	476	43.8	261	24.0	2.69
Increase Reading Speed	1126	239	21.5	156	14.0	448	40.3	270	24.3	2.67

T A B L E 3 (cont'd)

Evening Students Survey
Needs Assessment

PERCEIVED NEED	TOTAL N	VERY UNIMP N	VERY UNIMP PCNT	UNIMP N	UNIMP PCNT	IMP N	IMP PCNT	VERY IMP N	VERY IMP PCNT	MEAN
Nontraditional Course Credit	1086	270	24.9	140	12.9	367	33.8	309	28.5	2.66
Time - Management	1112	272	24.5	129	11.6	425	38.2	286	25.7	2.65
Expressing Personal Values	1084	267	24.6	108	10.0	452	41.7	257	23.7	2.65
Decision Making Skills	1120	303	27.1	133	11.9	396	35.4	288	25.7	2.60
Handling Pressure	1116	310	27.8	145	13.0	366	32.8	295	26.4	2.57
Graduation Requirements	1089	301	27.6	132	12.1	393	36.1	263	24.2	2.57
Leisure Time - Management	1116	316	28.3	135	12.1	388	34.8	277	24.8	2.56
Access to College Offices	1084	303	28.0	171	15.8	325	30.0	285	26.3	2.55
Work with Academic Advisers	1082	280	25.9	127	11.7	477	44.1	198	18.3	2.55
Transferring Credits	1087	303	27.9	162	14.9	358	32.9	264	24.3	2.54
Resume - Writing	1095	307	28.0	141	12.9	396	36.2	251	22.9	2.54
Health - Maintenance	1112	349	31.4	120	10.8	369	33.2	274	24.6	2.51
Job Openings	1090	343	31.5	131	12.0	357	32.8	259	23.8	2.49
Interpersonal Conflicts	1080	370	34.3	97	9.0	337	31.2	276	25.6	2.48
Interviewing Skills	1088	360	33.1	128	11.8	351	32.3	249	22.9	2.45
Rights as Consumer	1114	348	31.2	135	12.1	416	37.3	215	19.3	2.45
Budget - Management	1108	370	33.4	148	13.4	323	29.2	267	24.1	2.44
Understanding Different People	1078	355	32.9	128	11.9	416	38.6	179	16.6	2.39
Getting Along on the Job	1083	367	33.9	134	12.4	384	35.5	198	18.3	2.38
Available Jobs Near Home	1092	388	35.5	157	14.4	302	27.7	245	22.4	2.37
Dealing with Discrimination	1081	392	36.3	136	12.6	349	32.3	204	18.9	2.34
Part-time Work in Career Area	1090	377	34.6	183	16.8	321	29.4	209	19.2	2.33
Dealing w/Community Problems	1079	365	33.8	147	13.6	408	37.8	159	14.7	2.33
Noncredit Courses	1086	374	34.4	200	18.4	367	33.8	145	13.4	2.26
Understanding Govt. Activity	1079	406	37.6	169	15.7	356	33.0	148	13.7	2.23

T A B L E 3 (cont'd)

Evening Students Survey
Needs Assessment

PERCEIVED NEED	TOTAL N	VERY UNIMP N	VERY UNIMP PCNT	UNIMP N	UNIMP PCNT	IMP N	IMP PCNT	VERY IMP N	VERY IMP PCNT	MEAN
Family, Education, & Career	1080	437	40.5	148	13.7	312	28.9	183	16.9	2.22
Use of Library	1091	409	37.5	190	17.4	373	34.2	119	10.9	2.19
Raising Children	1082	517	47.8	98	9.1	250	23.1	217	20.1	2.15
Friendships	1081	423	39.1	198	18.3	340	31.5	120	11.1	2.15
Financial Aid	1089	448	41.1	208	19.1	280	25.7	153	14.0	2.13
Enrollment Procedures	1088	437	40.2	243	22.3	291	26.7	117	10.8	2.08
Improving Personal Appearance	1082	487	45.0	182	16.8	270	25.0	143	13.2	2.06
College Re-entry	1078	466	43.2	215	19.9	289	26.8	108	10.0	2.04
Marital Problems	1075	559	52.0	155	14.4	229	21.3	132	12.3	1.94
Getting Around Campus	1087	555	51.1	194	17.8	235	21.6	103	9.5	1.89
Transportation to Campus	1085	580	53.5	228	21.0	182	16.8	95	8.8	1.81
Services for Handicapped	1081	640	59.2	174	16.1	178	16.5	89	8.2	1.74
Child Care Services	1086	651	59.9	221	20.3	138	12.7	76	7.0	1.67
Single Parent Problems	1082	718	66.4	145	13.4	109	10.1	110	10.2	1.64
Divorce Problems	1080	721	66.8	168	15.6	116	10.7	75	6.9	1.58

For this reason, in order to gain a better understanding of the related needs of the evening students, a factor analysis was performed to determine the clustering patterns of the students' needs.

Factor Analysis

Factor analysis is a multivariate statistical technique which provides a means of determining more basic underlying dimensions or common factors based on the intercorrelations of a larger number of related variables. In other words, "factor analysis asks the degree to which clusters of intercorrelated variables may represent fewer underlying, more basic hypothetical variables" (Williams, Frederick. Reasoning with Statistics, 2nd ed., Holt, Rhinehart, and Winston, 1979, p. 161).

In the preceding descriptive analysis, the needs were ordered by the highest average response to lowest average response on the 65 needs items. Although average responses, percentages and frequencies do provide useful indexes of student needs, they do not provide information on the clustering patterns of related needs.

Many of the items rated unimportant by most of the students, such as divorce or marital problems, when considered in combination with other related variables, emerged as a meaningful construct in the factor analysis.

A factor analysis was performed on the 65 needs items utilizing the BMDP statistical package on 941 students who completed all the items. Initial examination of the correlations of the original needs items indicated that some variables were highly

related to other variables based on the responses, but not correlated with others.

The rotated factor solution yielded ten underlying factors that represent basic needs of the SSCC evening students. An oblique rotation yielded the most meaningful and parsimonious solution. Interpretation of a factor involves examining which variables load relatively high ($\geq .30$) on that factor. It may then be decided what meaningful label may be given to that factor, based on the original variables that do load on the factor.

The ten significant factors extracted from the analysis explained approximately 65% of the total variation in the students' responses. The first four factors are the most important, explaining more than 50% of the total cumulative proportion of variance.

The ten factors, based on the factor loadings, were assigned the following labels that describe the basic underlying perceived needs of the students:

Factor 1 - Need for personal development and self-improvement.

Factor 2 - Need for academic skill improvement.

Factor 3 - Need for career development skills.

Factor 4 - Need for understanding social issues and individual differences.

Factor 5 - Need for academic advising/counseling.

Factor 6 - Need for communication skills and improved interpersonal relations.

Factor 7 - Non-credit and course scheduling concerns.

Factor 8 - Need for job placement/job seeking skills.

Factor 9 - Need for orientation/special services.

Factor 10 - Need for personal/family counseling.

Table 5 presents detailed information of the loadings of the original variables on the factors. The factors appear to be relatively uncorrelated with each other as indicated by the relatively low to moderate correlations presented in Table 6.

The interpretation of factors is a somewhat subjective decision of the researcher. In this factor analysis, the first factor reflecting needs for personal self-development includes needs such as budgeting money, time management, setting goals, identifying strengths, handling pressure, becoming more independent, developing self-confidence, developing decision-making skills, etc. The fact that this major factor is more highly correlated with factor 2 (need for improving academic skills) and factor 6 (need for improving communication skills) and interpersonal relations) may be indicators of primary needs of the students. These primary needs could be addressed directly in orientation or developmental programs, or indirectly in the classroom.

The other factors i.e., need for career development, academic advising/counseling, scheduling, job-seeking/placement skills, and special services are more specific indicators of the students' needs for student services or programs.

This analysis provides information on the aggregate evening student body. Further analysis of subgroups could provide more information on the specific needs areas of certain groups of students.

TABLE 4

Factor Analysis of Evening Students Needs Assessment

Factor	*Variance Explained by Rotated Factor
Factor 1 - Need for personal development and self-improvement.	23.74
Factor 2 - Need for academic skill improvement.	4.02
Factor 3 - Need for career development skills.	3.59
Factor 4 - Need for understanding social issues and individual differences.	2.32
Factor 5 - Need for academic advising/counseling.	1.92
Factor 6 - Need for communication skills and improved interpersonal relations.	1.75
Factor 7 - Non-credit and course scheduling concerns.	1.46
Factor 8 - Need for job placement/job seeking skills.	1.32
Factor 9 - Need for orientation/special services.	1.09
Factor 10 - Need for personal/family counseling.	1.05

*The cumulative percentage of variance explained by the 10 significant factors was 65%.

TABLE 5

Description of the Ten Factors

Factor 1 Need for Personal Development and Self-Improvement		Factor 2 Need for Academic Skill Improvement	
Factor Loading	Original Need Item	Factor Loading	Original Need Item
.751	Budget Management	.842	Improving Reading Comprehension
.741	Time Management	.789	Increasing Reading Speed
.703	Decision-Making Skills	.771	Improving Speaking Skills
.690	Health Maintenance	.769	Improving Writing Skills
.654	Rights as a Consumer	.726	Improving Study Skills
.642	Leisure-Time Management	.671	Improving Test-Taking Skills
.609	Handling Pressure	.602	Improving Math Skills
.602	Independent Learning Skills	.359	Developing Self-Confidence
.591	Becoming More Independent		
.500	Identifying Strengths		
.404	Setting Goals		
.359	Developing Self-Confidence		

T A B L E 5 (cont'd)

Description of the Ten Factors

Factor 3 Need for Career Counseling Development of Skills		Factor 4 Need for Understanding Social Issues and Individual Differences	
Factor Loading	Original Need Item	Factor Loading	Original Need Item
.819	Training Requirements for Jobs	.761	Dealing with Community Problems
.809	Job Opportunities	.750	Understanding Different People
.694	Income Potential in Career	.713	Dealing with Discrimination
.683	Training for New Career	.726	Understanding Races/Cultures
.608	Identifying Career Areas	.660	Understanding Govt. Activities
.543	Full-time Exp. in New Career Area	.408	Interpersonal Conflicts
.492	Discussing Career Interests	.352	Coping with Marital Problems
.350	Setting Goals	.284	Raising Children in Complex Society
.302	Part-time Work in Career Area		

T A B L E 5 (cont'd)

Description of the Ten Factors

Factor 5 Need for Academic Advising/Counseling		Factor 6 Need for Communication Skills and Improved Interpersonal Relations	
Factor Loading	Original Need Item	Factor Loading	Original Need Item
.734	Entrance Requirements	.726	Getting Along on the Job
.623	Enrollment Procedures	.713	Personal Friendships
.619	Advice re: Educational Plans	.643	Expressing Personal Values
.587	Graduation Requirements	.544	Improving Personal Appearance
.570	Financial Aid	.506	Communication with Instructors
.554	Selecting Educational Programs	.345	Family, Education, and Career
.512	College Re-Entry Procedures	.302	Working with Academic Adviser
.438	Transferring Credits		
.340	Working with Academic Advisers		

T A B L E 5 (cont'd)

Description of the Ten Factors

Factor 7 Scheduling and Non-Credit Concerns		Factor 8 Need for Job Placement/Job Seeking Skills	
Factor Loading	Original Need Item	Factor Loading	Original Need Item
.840	Arranging Class Schedule	.324	Full-time Exp. in New Career
.791	Access to College Offices	.633	Job Opportunities
.595	Nontraditional Credit	.538	Available Jobs Near Home
.456	Noncredit Courses	.569	Interviewing Skills
.349	Working with Academic Advisers	.517	Resume-Writing
		.516	Part-time Work in Career Area
		.368	Discussing Career Interests
		.341	Setting Goals

T A B L E 5 (cont'd)

Description of the Ten Factors

Factor 9 Need for Orientation/Special Services		Factor 10 Need for Personal/Family Counseling	
Factor Loading	Original Need Item	Factor Loading	Original Need Items
.650	Transportation to Campus	.705	Divorce Problems
.641	Services for Handicapped	.710	Single Parent Problems
.640	Child Care Services	.670	Raising Children
.475	Getting Around Campus	.464	Marital Problems
.314	College Re-entry	.313	Interpersonal Conflicts
.270	Use of Library Facilities		

TABLE 6

Evening Student Survey
Factor Correlations for Rotated Factors

	FACTOR 1	FACTOR 2	FACTOR 3	FACTOR 4	FACTOR 5	FACTOR 6	FACTOR 7	FACTOR 8	FACTOR 9	FACTOR 10
FACTOR 1	1.000									
FACTOR 2	0.457	1.000								
FACTOR 3	0.382	0.288	1.000							
FACTOR 4	0.309	0.316	0.210	1.000						
FACTOR 5	0.310	0.326	0.377	0.319	1.000					
FACTOR 6	0.442	0.343	0.252	0.442	0.337	1.000				
FACTOR 7	0.181	0.224	0.191	0.320	0.361	0.312	1.000			
FACTOR 8	0.135	0.123	0.232	0.162	0.270	0.158	0.179	1.000		
FACTOR 9	0.152	0.177	0.121	0.233	0.292	0.203	0.232	0.200	1.000	
FACTOR 10	0.218	0.164	0.126	0.320	0.200	0.322	0.204	0.160	0.250	1.000

Qualitative Information

The students were invited to provide comments. The comments from the Midtown respondents were primarily related to concerns on the inadequacy of parking, lighting of parking lots, parking tickets, and security in going to and from night classes. Some students also expressed concerns related to scheduling of courses and access to the bookstore for evening students. The satellite campus respondents were mainly concerned with course offerings and scheduling with a particular emphasis on increased course offerings.

FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, and RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings

The majority of the evening students indicated that the most important reason for continuing their education as "to become better educated". This general reason was reported by 98% of the 1188 students who responded to the survey. More than 80% also indicated that personal satisfaction and to improve their income were important reasons for continuing their education. Approximately 79% responded that meeting job requirements or improving job skills were important. Learning a new occupation or trade was also listed by 79% as important to very important. On the other hand, only 36% considered meeting new people as important.

The majority of the students, about 75%, are continuing their education while maintaining employment, with 58% being employed on a full-time basis. Most of these students understandably indicated a preference for evening class course scheduling. The evening students were somewhat evenly divided between a pre-

ference for the traditional lecture format and the small-group discussion or self-paced study instructional modes.

The responses to the 65 needs items, which pertained to possible personal, academic, or career development needs, were in a positive direction. Large percentages reported perceiving these needs as important or very important to them as a student at SSCC. Goal setting was by far the most frequently reported need with 84% of the students perceiving this item as important to very important. Although the frequencies, percentages, and average responses to the needs items provide valuable information, it is difficult to establish patterns of needs in this format. Additionally, some needs which are at the lower end could possibly be misconstrued as unimportant.

In order to counteract this problem, a factor analysis was undertaken in an attempt to detect any possible underlying factors or clustering patterns of the 65 related needs items. With this procedure, 10 factors were extracted which represented 10 more basic underlying needs constructs of the evening students. Based on the factor loadings of the original variables the following ten needs areas, in order of relative importance were identified: (1) need for personal development and self-improvement; (2) need for academic skill improvement; (3) need for career development skills; (4) need for understanding social issues and individual differences; (5) need for academic advising/counseling; (6) need for communication skills and improving interpersonal relations; (7) non-credit and course scheduling concerns; (8) need for job placement, job seeking skills; (9) need for

orientation/special services; and (10) need for personal/family counseling.

Approximately 65% of the variance in the responses to the needs items was accounted for by the ten significant factors. The remaining 35% of the unexplained variation was due to individual differences or error. The factors were relatively uncorrelated suggesting that these 10 factors do reflect separate underlying needs dimensions. The first two factors reflecting needs for self-improvement and improvement of academic skills were moderately related with a correlation coeefficient of .47.

Some students expressed concerns over the inadequacy of parking and their own personal safety and security in going to and from night classes. Other concerns were with broader course offerings at the satellite campuses and access to the bookstore at night and during registration.

Conclusions

Shelby State evening students are continuing their education primarily to "become better educated". These students are also seeking personal satisfaction and improvement of job- or employment-related concerns. Social reasons or meeting new people do not appear to be of primary concern to these evening students. Most of the students are employed and prefer a schedule of evening classes in order to pursue their educational goals. More students prefer the traditional lecture format, but many also prefer small group discussion or self-paced study.

Goal setting was the most important perceived need of the evening students. This finding may have implications for many

broad areas of a students' educational experience at SSCC.

The ten basic factors extracted have several implications for planning programs and services at SSCC. It should be recognized by faculty and administrators that the needs assessment provides documentation on the basic needs of the evening students. Although most are currently employed and are primarily interested in improving their employment status, these students have some very basic personal and academic needs that should be considered in any institutional planning effort for student retention.

Recommendations

Existing and new programs and services should incorporate features which both specifically and generally address the needs of the evening students. Efforts should be made to offer as broad a curriculum as possible to accommodate these students who are attempting to complete their goals at night while maintaining employment.

The overriding need of these students for personal development and self-improvement should be recognized not only through the implementation of student services, but in the interpersonal contact of all college personnel and faculty in their interactions with the students. The second most important need of improving academic skills suggests a similar positive approach to a problem to which students may be sensitive on an individual basis.

A comprehensive career development approach including a range of developmental skills from goal-setting through job-seeking skills should be implemented. A more holistic approach may also

need to be incorporated in the process of academic/counseling and advising throughout a student's program of studies.

SUMMARY

The evening students at SSCC are attempting to gain a better education, improve themselves, and upgrade their employment and personal potentials. Most are attempting to reach these goals while maintaining full-time employment.

The more important underlying needs of the students are very basic needs for personal and academic success. Specific needs, particularly in the areas of skill improvement, academic advising/counseling, and career development should be addressed in an institutional planning effort for student retention.

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